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A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE

CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. *PAUL*,

LONDON,

BEFORE

HIS MAJESTY,

AND BOTH

HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT,

ON TUESDAY, DECEMBER 19th, 1797;

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED FOR A

GENERAL THANKSGIVING.

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BY GEORGE, LORD BISHOP OF LINCOLN.

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ORDERED,

THAT the Thanks of this Houſe be given to the LORD BISHOP OF LINCOLN, for the excellent Sermon by him preached before His MAJESTY and both HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT, at St. Paul's Church, Yeſterday, the Day of Public Thankſgiving appointed by His MAJESTY; and that Mr. RYDER and Mr. BURDON do attend his Lordſhip with the Thanks of this Houſe.

J. LEY,
Cl. D. Dom. Com.

2 SAM. c. xxii. v. 1, 2, and part of 3.

AND DAVID SPAKE UNTO THE LORD THE WORDS OF THIS SONG, IN THE DAY THAT THE LORD HAD DELIVERED HIM OUT OF THE HAND OF ALL HIS ENEMIES, AND OUT OF THE HAND OF SAUL: AND HE SAID, THE LORD IS MY ROCK AND MY FORTRESS, AND MY DELIVERER: THE GOD OF MY ROCK, IN HIM WILL I TRUST.

THERE is no article of religion in which mankind is more interested than in the doctrine of the providence of God, superintending the works of his hands, and directing the agency with which he invested them to the gracious purposes of his will. A firm belief that the various occurrences of human life, the

actions of men, and the operations of matter, are alike ſubject to the government of an all-wiſe and benevolent Being, adminiſters hope and conſolation under the preſſure of every ſpecies of adverſity, and teaches us in proſperity to acknowledge our Heavenly Father as the Author of all good.

This doctrine ſtands revealed in Scripture in the plaineſt and moſt unequivocal terms. All things are there repreſented as under the immediate direction of Divine Providence, not "ſlumbering or ſleeping *," but acting equally at all times and in all places, and embracing the whole race of mankind, and all the works of creation, with the ſame univerſal and inceſſant care. "The hairs of our head are all numbered;" and "a "ſparrow falls not to the ground †" without the permiſſion of God. The moſt turbulent elements of the material world, and the moſt unruly paſſions of men, equally obey the will of their great Creator: "He "ſtilleth the raging of the ſea, and the madneſs of "the people ‡." Nothing is ſo inconſiderable as to

* Pſalm cxxi. 4. Pſalm lxv. 7.

† Matt. x. 29 and 30.

eſcape

eſcape his knowledge; nothing ſo great as to ſurpaſs his power.

But though the controlling influence of the Almighty extends over the whole and every part of the univerſe, yet kingdoms and nations moſt ſignally diſplay his conſtant government, and are to be conſidered as the more peculiar objects of his providential care. If he watches over the concerns of individuals with paternal regard, how much more worthy of his ſuperintendance are the affairs of thoſe larger communities, in which not only the intereſts of thouſands, but the happineſs or miſery of the beſt and moſt faithful of his ſervants, muſt neceſſarily be involved? The truth of this poſition is abundantly illuſtrated and confirmed in the Books of the Old Teſtament. The hiſtory of the Jews is a continued ſeries of Divine interpoſitions; and we find them alternately ſuffering predicted calamities, or enjoying promiſed bleſſings, according to the meaſure of their obedience or diſobedience to the commands of God. The counſels of the Almighty with reſpect to kingdoms may be more manifeſt in the caſe of his choſen people, than in that of any other nation; but "with God

"there is no variableneſs, neither ſhadow of turning*;" the ways of Providence are uniform and unalterable; and the ſame principles of wiſdom, mercy, and juſtice which governed the Jews, ever did, and ever will, govern all the nations of the world.

The riſe and fall of empires, and the various changes in the different kingdoms of the earth, which hiſtory records, exhibit to the pious and reflecting mind continual proofs of the over-ruling power of God. But there never was a period when the hand of God was more apparent than in the age in which we live; nor was the gracious interpoſition of Providence ever more manifeſt than in the preſent ſituation of this kingdom, when compared with that of the neighbouring nations.

The events of theſe times, wonderful and inexplicable as they ſeem to ſuperficial obſervers, will be found, upon inquiry into the ſure though myſterious word of prophecy, to have been ordained in the counſels of the Sovereign Arbiter of the Univerſe, and ultimately

* James, i. 17.

to

to tend to the accompliſhment of the great plan of his Providence.

That the Scriptures contain predictions of the principal revolutions and moſt remarkable occurrences which were to take place in the Chriſtian Church, from the days of the Apoſtles to the final conſummation of all things, is a point generally allowed, although commentators are by no means agreed in the interpretation of thoſe paſſages which relate to future periods. Nor indeed is it conſiſtent with the nature and deſign of prophecy, that it ſhould be certainly and preciſely underſtood before its fulfilment. But let us remember that blame is always imputed to thoſe who neglect to take advantage of the light afforded them; and that we are commanded to "watch the ſigns of the times, that we "may avoid the evils of the latter days *." By comparing events with their predictions, as the hand of Time withdraws the veil, we learn to admire the wiſdom and conſiſtency of the Divine government of the world, and to acknowledge its invariable tendency, whether by bleſſings or by puniſhments, by correction, protection, or

* Matt. xvi. 3. 2 Peter, ii. 2 Tim. iii.

deſtruc-

deſtruction, to promote true religion and univerſal happineſs.

It would be impoſſible on this occaſion to enter into an examination of the numerous predictions in the Old and New Teſtament, which refer to theſe "latter days;" and therefore I ſhall barely obſerve, that it is perfectly conſiſtent with the ſentiments of thoſe learned men, who have devoted their attention to the ſtudy of prophecy, that the concluſion of the preſent century ſhould be the commencement of a period of conſiderable danger to the faith of real Chriſtians, and of great calamity and diſtreſs among the nations profeſſing the doctrines, and involved in the conſequent vices, of Anti-chriſtian Rome. And it was the opinion of the illuſtrious Sir Iſaac Newton, who was equally diſtinguiſhed for comprehenſive thought, acuteneſs of inveſtigation, and humble piety, that "the tyranny of Popiſh ſuperſtition muſt "be put a ſtop to and broken in pieces by the temporary "prevalence of infidelity, before the reign of primitive "Chriſtianity ſhould be extended over the world *."

* Whiſton on the Revelations, 2d edit. p. 321.

The Conſpiracy lately formed and ſyſtematically carried on for the utter extirpation of the Chriſtian religion *, the rapid propagation of atheiſtical principles, the extraordinary ſufferings of thoſe countries which were formerly the moſt zealous ſupporters of the Papal power, and the trials and dangers to which other Chriſtian nations are expoſed, lead us to believe, that the prophecies, from which theſe inferences are drawn, are now receiving their accompliſhment. We may therefore be juſtified in conſidering the preſent power of France as the appointed inſtrument of puniſhment to the corrupt part of the Chriſtian world, and of diſcipline and trial to thoſe who hold "the faith which was once delivered "unto the Saints †;" and this is the only principle upon which we can account for the aſtoniſhing ſucceſs which has attended their arms, and for the adoption of their opinions, in a greater or leſs degree, in moſt of the countries of Europe. The long pre-eminence of the

* Vide Memoires pour ſervir à l'Hiſtoire du Jacobiniſme, par M. l'Abbé Barruel; and Robiſon's Proofs of a Conſpiracy againſt all the Religions and Governments of Europe, carried on in the Secret Meetings of Free-Maſons, Illuminati, &c.

† Jude, iii.

French

French nation in every ſpecies of vice and irreligion, fitted them but too well for this tremendous office; and it has been wiſely ordered, that in executing the vengeance of Heaven, they ſhould themſelves ſuffer torments greater than thoſe which they inflict upon others: To uſe the ſtrong expreſſion of the Pſalmiſt, "Their ſwords have "entered into their own hearts *."

From obvious cauſes, the cruelty, the tyranny, and the impiety of the Church of Rome have almoſt faded from our memory; but we muſt bring them back to our recollection, if we would underſtand "the judgments of "God which are abroad in the earth †." She is now perſecuted in her turn. As Engliſhmen we forget her injuries; as Chriſtians we pity and give alms to her exiled adherents, regardleſs of the malicious endeavours of our adverſaries to repreſent the Church of England as itſelf intereſted in her preſervation. But let us only advert to the principles, religious and civil, upon which we ſeparated from that idolatrous and intolerant power; and it will be evident that, as a national church, we can have neither part nor lot in this matter. Our cauſes are

* Pſalm xxxvii. 15. † Iſaiah, xxvi. 9.

diſtinct,

diſtinct, and muſt ever remain ſo; and we have now more abundant reaſon than ever to rejoice in our Reformed Religion. Our fathers obeyed the warning voice*, and left her corrupt communion when ſhe had riſen to the zenith of her glory; and we have hitherto eſcaped the plagues by which ſhe is now tormented.

And let it not paſs unobſerved, that of all the countries in which the Proteſtant faith is eſtabliſhed upon the Continent of Europe, only one has been allowed to fall a victim to the deſolating peſt which walks the earth. Was ſhe conquered by the ſword of France? No.—Tainted by the deadly poiſon of her principles, ſhe deſerted the faith for which her anceſtors had contended with ſuch glorious ſucceſs againſt the arms of Papal tyranny; betrayed the friend who had nouriſhed her in infancy, ſupported her in danger, and with the bleſſing of God might ſtill have ſaved her; and baſely ſacrificed religion, honor, and independence, to the deluſive hope

* "And I heard another voice from Heaven, ſaying, Come out "of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her ſins, and that ye "receive not of her plagues." Rev. xviii. 4.

of protection for her wealth and trade from Atheiſtic deſpotiſm. And what has been the fate of this apoſtate nation? Is ſhe not enſlaved by the power with whom ſhe ſought alliance? Has ſhe not been deprived of the ſources of her riches and her commerce, by the people whom ſhe treacherouſly deſerted? Has not one of her fleets been taken as it were in a net, and another been completely vanquiſhed upon her own coaſt; and both, by that very nation whoſe maritime force ſhe vainly hoped, by the aid of France, to cruſh? But, as if to mark the purpoſe and the limits of the oppreſſor's power, that Proteſtant land, "for the ſake of the rem-"nant that dwell therein," has not been made the ſeat of war; nor have her ſufferings been equal in degree or kind to thoſe of any Popiſh country which has ſubmitted to the yoke of France.

When we conſider the activity and artifice with which the Agents of Evil have diſſeminated their noxious principles, and look at the preſent ſtate of England, how can we avoid concluding, that there muſt be ſome inherent qualities in the Eſtabliſhments of this kingdom in Church and State, which check the growing miſchief,

miſchief, and raiſe the virtues and the glory of this nation above the reſt of Europe? The noble fabric of our Conſtitution was built up, as it were, within the precincts of our Altar. The antient foundations were gradually cleared, as the light of the Reformation increaſed; and this fortreſs of our liberties and happineſs was erected by the temperate meaſures and ſkilful labours of men deeply ſenſible of the ineſtimable value of the Goſpel of Righteouſneſs, as it relates to "this world as well "as to that which is to come *." And to the general diffuſion of religious knowledge which their wiſdom and piety ſecured to us by law, are we indebted for all our preſent bleſſings. Where will be found ſuch ſtrict adherence to public faith; ſuch impartial adminiſtration of juſtice; ſuch fidelity in the concerns of private life; ſuch liberal attention to the poor; ſuch kindneſs to the ſtranger; ſuch generoſity to the priſoner? The wiſe and underſtanding people of this great nation, knowing and feeling the value of thoſe inſeparable bleſſings, genuine liberty and true religion, diſdainfully reject the inſidious attempts to bewilder their reaſon, inflame

* 1 Tim. iv. 8.

their paſſions, and rob them of their happineſs; and upon every emergency the bulk of all deſcriptions of men have diſplayed a zeal, a loyalty, and a patriotiſm truly characteriſtic of the Britiſh nation. While our enemies have inſulted the Majeſty of Heaven, we have humbled ourſelves before our God, and acknowledged our tranſgreſſions. While they have impiouſly denied his all-controlling power, we have prayed unto the Lord to give wiſdom to our councils, ſucceſs to our arms, and ſteadineſs to our people. And he has heard us. The gracious interpoſition of his Providence has been apparent in ſaving us from open and from ſecret enemies, —from famine—from invaſion—from inſurrection—from treaſon. Our conqueſts are extenſive; our commerce flouriſhing; our land in peace; the courage, magnanimity, and diſcipline of our Army have been moſt eminently conſpicuous; and our Fleets have been triumphant beyond the boaſt of former times. The Banners, which you have this day ſeen preſented at the altar of this Cathedral Church of the Metropolis, as the moſt public teſtimony of devout and humble gratitude to the Supreme Diſpoſer of all events, are not the trophies of a ſingle victory over one enemy,

but of a ſeries of victories, equally brilliant and important, over the three nations of Europe moſt diſtinguiſhed for their maritime power. The commanders of our fleets have diſplayed an unexampled degree of zeal, promptitude, and ſkill; and our ſeamen have fought with a ſpirit and intrepidity which we ſhould in vain ſeek even in the annals of this country. Our naval ſtrength, raiſed to a height unknown at any former period, not only exceeds that of every rival neighbour, but has compelled each in its turn to ſubmit to our ſuperiority; and has reduced them all to the degraded ſtate of ſeeing a victorious fleet of England bidding them defiance in the very mouths of their harbours. But Hiſtory ſhall celebrate the glory of our Navy, and the ſplendor of theſe atchievements; and while ſhe tranſmits to the admiration of diſtant ages the profeſſional merit of our commanders, I truſt ſhe will not fail to record the diſtinguiſhed piety of one of our heroes, not only as adding luſtre to his other virtues, but as an uſeful leſſon to all poſterity.

The value of theſe victories will appear ineſtimable, if we reflect upon the allowed importance

of

of our naval force to the proſperity of theſe kingdoms, and upon the nature of the conteſt in which we are engaged. We are not contending for the ordinary objects of worldly ambition. The points now at iſſue are, whether we ſhall continue "to ſit "under our own vine*, and eat our bread with cheer-"fulneſs;" whether we ſhall preſerve ourſelves an independent and a Chriſtian kingdom; whether we ſhall any longer enjoy the protection of laws, or the comforts of religion; whether our poſterity ſhall inherit the conſtitution which we received from our fathers, and whether our ſons and our daughters ſhall ſtand up after us in the congregation of the Lord. May this nation, now ſolemnly aſſembled by the piety of our Sovereign to give glory and thankſgiving to God for theſe ſignal and repeated inſtances of his mercy, unite, as the heart of one man, in repentance for paſt tranſgreſſions, and ſupplication for future aid and protection! May we here, in the houſe of our God, deliberately reſolve to be "ſtedfaſt in the faith," which is truly "the hope of our ſalvation;" to bear with

* Micah, iv. 4.

fortitude

fortitude our portion of the general diſtreſs produced by the general iniquity of the times; to be firm, vigilant, and perſevering in the defence of our religion, our king, and our country; and ever to hold it as a ſacred duty to tranſmit inviolate to our children the civil and religious rights which our anceſtors ſo glorioufly obtained!

As England was formerly the bulwark of the Proteſtant faith, ſo now muſt ſhe be the bulwark of Chriſtianity itſelf. The horrible conſpiracy to exterminate the Chriſtian religion, firſt projected by the man whoſe Apotheoſis was publicly celebrated with enthuſiaſtic rapture in the capital of France, declares, beyond the poſſibility of doubt, the nature of the warfare to which we are ſummoned. But the diſcovery and diſplay of this conſpiracy, at this eventful period of the world, are ſurely deſigned to eſtabliſh the faith of real Chriſtians, and confirm their truſt in the promiſes of God. They will ſee in this atrocious attempt the moſt accurate fulfilment of prophecy; and their confidence that "the gates of hell ſhall not

"prevail

" prevail againſt the church of Chriſt *," will be ſtrengthened by this teſtimony to the truth of the ſacred writings. It may alſo be graciouſly deſigned to increaſe the number of true believers from among that claſs of men who look not beyond the preſent world, but who are anxious to promote virtue, peace, good order, and happineſs among mankind. The view of exiſting circumſtances, preſented thus clearly to their eyes, may lead them to a more ſerious inquiry into the origin of a religion allowed by its enemies to be the moſt effectual barrier againſt vice, anarchy, confuſion, and miſery; or at leaſt its acknowledged importance to the ſafety of the ſtate may ſecure them in its ſtrenuous defence.

On many occaſions have the inhabitants of theſe kingdoms ſtood forth in ſupport of the eſtabliſhed religion at the expence of the blood and treaſure of the nation. Let not the preſent age be diſgraced by feeling leſs zeal, when the conteſt is between Chriſtians and Infidels, than our fathers felt, when the conteſt

* Matt. xvi. 18.

was

was between Proteſtants and Papiſts. Often have they reſiſted the encroachments of a haughty rival upon their dominions, power, and wealth: but we are now called to ſtrive with enemies who have avowed, even in the public acts of their government, the moſt rancorous hatred againſt this kingdom, and a fixed determination to employ their concentrated force to overthrow our laws, our liberties, and our religion. The ſubverſion of the eſtabliſhed government of every country in which they have erected their ſtandard; the faithleſſneſs and treachery with which they have acted towards every people with whom they have pretended to make alliance; the ſyſtematic plunder of every order in ſociety; the intolerant perſecution of every opinion, cuſtom, or uſage inimical to their views, and the diffuſion of principles deſtructive of the eternal as well as temporal intereſts of mankind, muſt ſurely convince us from facts which cannot be controverted, that this war is, both in the objects for which we are contending, and in the character of our enemy, fundamentally different from any other in which we were ever engaged. And ſhall we doubt the iſſue of the conteſt in ſuch a cauſe, and with ſuch

enemies? "The Lord himſelf will be on our ſide, "and we need not fear what man can do unto us *, "for he will deliver his people from the blaſphemers "of his holy name." The dazzling ſplendor of their conqueſts cannot deceive us, who ſee the awful purport of their commiſſion, into a belief of their real proſperity. The objects as well as the inſtruments of puniſhment, they are at this moment a prey to tyranny, plunder, profligacy, and atheiſm; and while the deluſive ſounds, Fraternity, Liberty, and Equality, are echoed through the land, every ſocial tie is broken; the chains with which they mean to enſlave the world are rivetted upon themſelves; and unprecedented miſery pervades the mighty maſs formed by promiſcuous ruins.

But, though the ſuperior purity of our eſtabliſhed religion, and the comparative excellence of our national character, may inſpire us with a confident hope that we ſhall not participate in all the miſeries of the cup of retribution, now pouring out upon the corrupted church of Chriſt; yet let it ever be remembered that

* Pſalm cxviii. 6.

God

God requires his ſervants to put forth all their ſtrength in defence of the bleſſings which, through his bounty, they enjoy. The preſcience of God and the free-agency of man are indeed incomprehenſible by our finite underſtanding; but the irreverſible decrees of God, and the neceſſity of human exertion, are, in the divine government of the world, perfectly compatible. Promiſed bleſſings are declared to be certain, although accompanied with conditions which appear to be contingent; and the voluntary actions of men, as being foreſeen by the Almighty, are repreſented as the ground and cauſe of his future aſſiſtance, and as eſſential to the accompliſhment of events which he has ordained to take place.

The inſpired apoſtle St. Paul, in his voyage to Rome, was authorized to declare, when the ſhip appeared to be ſinking in a ſtorm, that none of the crew ſhould periſh. But when ſome of the men were puſillanimouſly endeavouring to deſert the veſſel, he added, "Except theſe men abide in the ſhip, ye cannot be "ſaved*:" that is, their preſervation depended upon

* Acts, xxvii. 31.

every man's ſtanding to his poſt and doing his duty. In like manner, we are now toſſed by a tempeſtuous wind, and the waves beat violently againſt us; but we have ground for truſting that we ſhall get ſafely into port, if we be not wanting to ourſelves. "Abide "in the ſhip;" ſtand firm to your duty; and then "Fear not, for ye ſhall ſee the ſalvation of God *. "Fear not; but ſerve the Lord with all your heart, "for the Lord will not forſake his people for his great "name's ſake: only fear the Lord, and ſerve him in "truth; for conſider how great things he hath done for "you, and that he hath not dealt ſo with any other "nation †."

We muſt not however vainly preſume that we ſhall eſcape all chaſtiſement in this predicted day of vengeance and purification, though "we are not as many "who corrupt the word of God ‡." Hitherto we ſeem to have been graciouſly "chaſtened of the Lord, that "we ſhould not be condemned with the world §:" but who ſhall ſay to what extent correction may become

* Exod. xiv. 13.
† 1 Sam. xii. 20—25.
‡ 2 Cor. ii. 17.
§ 1 Cor. xi. 32.

neceſſary,

neceſſary, if we neglect to hear the awful threatenings of the Lord, and "to adorn," by the purity of our lives and converſation, "the doctrine we "profeſs*?" "Behold his arm is lifted up in judgment, "and all the nations of the earth muſt fear before him: "for He is like a refiner's fire †." Many are the virtues which diſtinguiſh this nation, but our ſins are alſo many and grievous. Surely the extraordinary events of theſe times muſt awaken in men a ſenſe of religion: recollection of mercies received; proſpect of impending evils; examples of ſuffering nations all around us; every thing which can intereſt or animate the human mind, concur to rouſe our latent piety, and to baniſh that diſregard to the ſacred ordinances of our religion, and that languid indifference reſpecting the principles and duties of Chriſtianity, which are the moſt formidable ſigns of danger to this country.

Let us then ſanctify this day of thankſgiving to our Heavenly Benefactor, by ſolemn vows of future zeal in his ſervice, of future obedience to his will! Let every

* Titus, ii. 10. † Mal. iii. 2.

inhabitant

inhabitant of theſe kingdoms, whatever may be his rank or condition, reflect, that as he has a ſhare in the benefits of theſe victories, ſo he has an obligation of gratitude impoſed upon him; that a faithful diſcharge of that debt can alone give a claim to the future protection of Heaven; and that by reforming himſelf, he may perhaps complete "that number of the right-"eous, for whoſe ſake the city ſhall be ſaved*." Let us ever bear in mind the neceſſary connection between national virtue and national proſperity, which reaſon and experience alike aſſert; and which is ſet before us by infallible authority in the circumſtantial hiſtory of the people of Iſrael. God never failed to hear their prayers, and to reſcue them from their oppreſſors, when they repented of their ſins, and "walked as obedient "children." But when they rebelled againſt him, neither did he fail to deliver them again into the hands of the ſpoilers. They were often puniſhed in mercy; but theſe mild and temporary corrections produced not a laſting effect; and the final conſequence of their continuing in ſin, and ſhutting their eyes againſt the light

* Gen. xviii. 24.

vouch-

vouchſafed them, was, their being ſurrendered up into the power of a cruel and implacable enemy, who utterly deſtroyed their civil and religious polity. The preſent ſituation of this country reſembles that of the Jews, immediately after they had experienced one of thoſe many ſignal interpoſitions of Divine favour. God grant the compariſon may end here, and that we may be found of the "number that was ſealed before the "day of vengeance;" and "be able, having done all, "to ſtand before the Son of Man*?"

May God for ever preſerve among us the true light of the Goſpel, that "Vineyard which his own right "hand hath planted†," that original ſource of all our various enjoyments, that ground of all our hopes of future bleſſings! May He eſtabliſh for ever our invaluable conſtitution in church and ſtate, the tried ſecurity of civil and religious freedom! May He long preſerve our exemplary King to a faithful and united people; and inſpire all ranks of men with wiſdom to underſtand, and firmneſs to maintain, the great

* Rev. vi. and vii. Eph. vi. 13. † Pſalm lxxx. 15.

cauſe in which we are engaged! May He continue to go forth with our fleets and our armies; and may He, in his own good time, turn the hearts of our enemies, and give us the bleſſing of an honourable, ſecure, and permanent peace!

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THE END.